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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the insights of superintendents about the school restructuring process in Kentucky and its likely effects. Data were derived from a focus group held with 24 members of the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC), and from a survey of 48 superintendents, of which 35 responded. A majority of respondents expressed widespread frustration with the Kentucky Educational Reform Act of 1990. They were unwilling to wholeheartedly embrace the restructuring agenda for the following reasons: unrealistic expectations, lack of support, the diminishing role of the superintendent, the relinquishing of power to untrained groups, conflicts with the state, and a focus on structure rather than content. If restructuring is to be successful, a number of issues must be addressed. First, there must be across-the-board fidelity to the basic operating philosophy of the prevailing reform ideology. This requires reform through empowerment rather than control. Second, policymakers and administrators need to have realistic expectations of reform. Finally, support must be provided to superintendents so that they can successfully transform their roles. (LMI)

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Restructuring Schools in Kentucky: Insights from Superintendents

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Analysts of educational reform in the United States over the last dozen years generally distinguish between a top-down set of initiatives that were designed to repair the system of schooling by ratcheting up controls and an assortment of measures that were crafted to transform the educational enterprise by empowering people. The first set of activities has become known as the "excellence" or "standards-raising" movement of the early-to-late 1980s. The latter approach, which began around 1986, has been labeled the "restructuring" movement (Murphy, 1990a). It is this latter approach to school improvement that occupies our attention in this paper.

While it is often argued that restructuring is plagued by an absence of conceptual clarity and definitional specificity, there is, nonetheless, general agreement about the major components of this agenda for change. Common elements include efforts to: decentralize decision making--from the state on through to the classroom; empower parents, students, and teachers; devise new forms of organization, governance, and management of schools; develop new roles and responsibilities for all members of the school community; and infuse constructivist approaches to learning and teaching into classrooms (Elmore, 1989; Murphy, 1991). A more justified critique centers on the lack of a firm empirical grounding for much of the school restructuring agenda. From questions of choice to those of school-based management, the debate about the appropriateness and potential effects of restructuring rages on, largely uninformed by research findings.

An equally troubling problem is our limited understanding of how restructuring initiatives are playing out in actual school communities. A matter of particular importance in this area has been the failure of policy makers and researchers to give voice to the concerns and judgments of the stakeholders involved in transformational reform efforts.

Over the last few years, we have been addressing this shortcoming, examining the feelings and concerns of teachers (Murphy, Evertson, & Radnofsky, 1991) and principals (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992; in press) as they set about restructuring the institutions in which they work. The purpose of this paper is to give voice to school superintendents, to discern their insights about the process and the likely effects of school restructuring. We begin by describing the procedures employed in the study. We then analyze the concerns of the 35 superintendents in the sample. In the concluding section, based on insights from these chief executive officers, we examine some issues that are vital to the success of school restructuring efforts.

Procedures

Sample

The major task was to select district superintendents who were involved in serious transformational reform efforts. Given the slowness of the restructuring movement to affect the superintendency in the United States (Murphy, 1991), we decided

to focus on a state in which considerable legal, political, and community pressure have been brought to bear to radically overhaul schooling from the classroom to the boardroom. Because it is generally acknowledged that Kentucky represents the best example of statewide systemic restructuring, superintendents in that state were targeted.

At the time of this investigation, there were 176 district superintendents in Kentucky. The group that was selected for this study includes 48 of these leaders who belong to the Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC)--a consortium that is organized to provide superintendents with an assortment of support functions, including professional development opportunities. These men and women are representative of superintendents throughout Kentucky in terms of size and type (city, suburban, rural) of district in which they work.

Methods

Because we were interested in generating hypotheses and other insights of an exploratory nature, a qualitative methodological approach was deemed to be most appropriate.

Focus Group

In order to have the superintendents hear from one another and stimulate one another's thinking, a focus group interview was held with 24 members of the KEDC. Morgan (1988) defines focus groups as follows:

> [F]ocus groups are basically group interviews, although not in the sense of alternation between the

> researcher's questions and the participants' responses. Instead the reliance is on the interaction with the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher, who typically takes the role of moderator. (pp. 9-10)

Accordingly,

> The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. (p. 12; emphasis in the original)

The role of the researcher in the focus group is twofold: to provide the stimulus material for the discussion and to facilitate the interactions. In this study, three broad stimulus questions, framed in the context of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA), formed the basis for discussion: What are your thoughts about the effects of the KERA in general? How are the KERA and subsequent restructuring efforts affecting the superintendency (i.e. your role)? And, how is this reform activity affecting district office operations?

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were developed to tap into five broad topics: the three areas discussed in the focus group, as well as superintendents' perceptions of the major purposes of restructuring and their insights concerning "the good, the bad, and the bothersome" in Kentucky's transformational reform efforts. Eleven open-ended questions focused on these five

topics. Questionnaires were returned by 35 of the 48 superintendents (73%) in the sample.

Data Analysis

For purposes of this paper, data from the focus group notes and questionnaire protocols were analyzed to discern areas of concern for superintendents in the restructuring agenda. Procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1984) were followed. The questionnaire data--comprised of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs in response to the 11 open-ended probes--were coded like interview transcriptions. Pattern coding and the construction of conceptually clustered matrices formed the heart of the analyses. A discussion of the findings follows.

Results

> In all probability, the singular most important aspect in the success or failure of restructuring and reform is the attitude displayed by the office of the superintendent. [33][1]

While this viewpoint somewhat overstates the importance of the superintendent in ensuring the success of restructuring initiatives, the general thrust of this claim is supported by the literature on school improvement (Fullan, 1991; Miles, 1983).[2] More importantly, it has been validated by studies focused specifically on various restructuring reform efforts (Murphy & Hallinger, 1993): "Students of restructuring are reaffirming a lesson learned in earlier studies of school improvement: the superintendent is the linchpin of sustaining reform movement"

(Murphy, 1991, p. 92). If this argument is valid, then it is probably safe to conclude that the likelihood of the successful restructuring of education in Kentucky is problematic at best.[3] For a variety of reasons which we detail in this section, there is little excitement among these superintendents for the KERA. In the focus group discussion, only three or four of the 24 superintendents were able to muster any real enthusiasm. Most are frustrated. Many are angry. Nearly all are pessimistic about the reform movement. They feel ignored at best and untrusted at worst--and in both cases bypassed. They believe that they are being made scapegoats for the educational problems in Kentucky. As managers and leaders of their districts, they are often overwhelmed by the difficulties and problems confronting those around them--district office colleagues, Board of Education members, teachers, parents, and principals. While less palpable, remarks from questionnaires confirm this widespread sense of frustration among these superintendents.

On a personal level, these educational leaders consistently report high and increasing levels of stress. References to "more stress" [15], "too much stress" [32], and "high levels of stress" [6] are intertwined throughout the reports:

> More stress to see success in district and building levels where you have less control to ensure [success]. [8]
>
> [S]tressful--greater responsibility with less means of managing diversity. [20]

For many of these superintendents, stress results in "less personal satisfaction from the job": [3][4]

> [N]ot looking to remain in the job for a long period of time. [3]
>
> It isn't as fun and exciting as it used to be. [26]
>
> Four years ago I enjoyed it; now just too much stress. I am going back to the farm. [32]
>
> I feel frustrated most of the time. Certainly not as enjoyable as the first four years. [29]

The dark hues with which they believe they were tainted during the drafting of the reform legislation and a perceived lack of confidence in their abilities by the creators of the KERA often inhibit these superintendents from moving proactively to reduce frustrations and stress. While others in the system may feel empowered by the KERA, most of these chief executive officers do not. Rather, they feel apprehensive, as revealed by comments such as the following that are laced throughout their discussions and questionnaire responses: "certain amount of reluctance" [20]; "more concerned about legal correctness and more defensive" [10]; "KERA has made me very cautious" [5].

While the frustrations of these school leaders are an important issue in their own right, of greater significance is what the analysis of this discontent tells us about the likely success of transformational change efforts in Kentucky. In unpacking and regrouping the insights from the 35 superintendents in this study, a number of concerns emerge, in addition to what

they view as a personal attack on the superintendency. They are unwilling to embrace wholeheartedly the restructuring agenda for the following reasons, all of which are relevant to the successful implementation of the reform measures embedded in the KERA: unrealistic expectations; lack of support; diminished role for the superintendent; turning power over to untrained groups; conflict with the state; and focus on structure rather than content.

Unrealistic Expectations

> Very time consuming--and what will the end results be? [22]

There is near unanimous agreement that the reform package in Kentucky places unreasonable expectations on the educational system in general and on individual school districts in particular. The KERA is seen as "too ambitious" [3]; "too much" [1, 32]; "too broad in scope" [1]; "overwhelming" [12]; "overburdening" [5]; encompassing "too many programs at one time" [15, 19, 25]; and "attempting to accomplish too much concurrently" [27]. Nearly every respondent targets the issue of what he or she judges to be unfair work expectations. In regard to themselves, references to "longer hours" [13] and "strain on time" [1]--to meeting themselves coming and going--are common:

> My wife and children rarely see me. [12]
>
> My work load has multiplied. I work late into the afternoon, many nights, and every Saturday and Sunday morning. [31]

> Counting time spent at home on school matters I easily work 80 hour weeks--I am fearful that my own children may soon qualify for one of our many programs for at-risk students due to having so little of their father's time. [27]

The fact that the KERA has "increased the workload for the entire staff" [33] is not lost on these superintendents:

> The amount of time it puts on the principal and the teachers, on the council, is the most bothersome aspect of restructuring. [2]
>
> Everyone is complaining about the time involved, especially the classroom teacher. [22]
>
> KERA has broken the back of central office staff . . . demands are coming so quickly [19]; more strain on central office staff. [34]
>
> Everyone's hours have increased and there is a great deal more stress on the faces of my staff. [31]

The fear that "the additional time and energy required [will lead to] the possibility that some newly empowered individuals or groups will burn out before meaningful changes are made" [4] is a theme that plays across the surface of these superintendents' comments.

The problem of what superintendents consider to be an unreasonable amount of reform to be implemented is exacerbated, they believe, by the pace at which improvements are expected. If "too much" is the most common refrain, "too rapidly" [29] is a

close second. Comments from two superintendents are representative of the larger group:

> Kentucky tried to do too much in a short period of time. [6]
>
> We may be trying to do too many things too fast at the same time. My district is supportive of KERA but overwhelmed by the magnitude of what needs to be accomplished and is expected of us in a brief time. [26]

Superintendents maintain that the "too much, too soon" [1] pattern in the reform fabric began to be woven when "not enough time [was provided] to do the necessary planning for the successful implementation of KERA" [1, 34]. Once the reform agenda was passed through to the districts, they report that "not enough time was provided for all the committee work and communication involved with such rapid change." [11] "Insufficient time for personnel to receive proper training" [6]--"retraining, inservice programs, etc." [22]--compounds the problem of insufficient implementation time. The added nature of the new work within existing time constraints is also mentioned:

> Staff is expected to do a tremendous task of changing the system in a short period of time, while having to deal with the routine and increased matters of the day. [22]

The time-consuming nature of many of the specific reform initiatives (e.g. "developing writing portfolios for each student" [22]) is also highlighted by a number of these leaders. Finally, superintendents are troubled by what they view as unrealistic implementation "timelines" [8] and "timeframes" [26]. The prevailing sentiment is that "the legislature's, department of education's, and public's demands for quick restructuring and results!" [27] have the power to derail improvement efforts, and that, if left unchecked, they are likely to do so.

Lack of Support

> There is never enough time, people, or money to go around. One would have to wonder, and it should be a cause for concern, how the inadequacies will someday hinder or deal the deathblow to reform and restructuring. [33]

Superintendent discontent is also fueled by what they perceive as "legislative expectancy for full implementation of all programs with inadequate support" [7]. According to the superintendents, there "are too many programs and too little staff" [12], "not enough time, . . . and not enough money" [33] to implement the KERA well. Since we have already examined time aspects of reform, the focus here is on the perceived shortages of other needed resources. On the funding front, two concerns are paramount--worries about the adequacy of current funding:

> There is not enough money to do all that they want done. We had the biggest tax increase 2 years ago and the state is broke now. [32]
>
> The general perception is that we have a great deal more funding to utilize . . . when in fact, we are not in high cotton. [17]
>
> It is the consensus among my colleagues that restructuring may be taking place too quickly without adequate funding. [33]

and anxiety about the viability of future financial backing for the KERA:

> There are still some doubts, as with the technology phase, whether the legislature will continue to fund it. [2]
>
> The most bothersome part of restructuring has been the cutback in finances during the second year of implementation [and] overestimating income and underestimating costs. [20]

There is also substantial agreement that, despite "a critical need for professional development" [15]--a "need for training, training, training" [15]--,staff development "has been lacking" [10] to help people prepare for their new roles in restructuring schools. "[I]nsufficient time for personnel to receive proper training" [6] is a particular concern of these superintendents. The absence of learning opportunities for four groups surfaced in the focus group discussion and the

questionnaire responses: (1) for superintendents to educate themselves to lead reform efforts and "help staff" [7] restructure their schools effectively; (2) for parents to assist them in developing expertise in "making important educational decisions" [6]; (3) for teachers to help them understand their new roles; and (4) for principals to enable them to "handle the politics of school-based decision making" [7].

Diminished Role for the Superintendent

> When KERA is fully implemented I fear that the superintendent will be a glorified, high paid CLERK. [31]

Those who have discussed the potential role of school administrators in the restoration of public education have tended to follow one of two distinct approaches (Murphy, 1990c; Slater, 1988). A number of influential figures maintain that school administrators are part of the educational problem. According to these scholars, superintendents (and principals) represent entrenched sets of values, beliefs, and ways of doing business that are often harmful to the educational process. They are also seen as having an inordinate amount of power and influence--vis-a-vis teachers, parents, and students. Reviewers who fall into this camp see little hope that these leaders will be willing to relinquish the reins of authority and reconfigure their roles to facilitate the empowerment of others in the educational system (Chubb, 1988). Consequently, this first group of reformers concludes that school leaders will need to be toppled or at least

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circumvented if the transformation of the American educational system is to be successful. A second group of reformers argues that school leaders such as superintendents are the key figures in the struggle for improved schooling, and that without their commitment and energy, little real reform will materialize (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1988). This second group maintains, therefore, that school administrators must be an integral component of solution strategies crafted to transform education in this country.

The 35 superintendents in this sample believe that the circumvention logic prevailed during the development of the KERA. They feel that they have been labeled one of the major causes of the poor educational system in Kentucky and are being bypassed in efforts designed to strengthen it. They perceive a tangible sense of mistrust emanating from the legislature and the Kentucky State Department of Education:

> Does not seem to be a trusting and supporting relationship between district and state authority. [10]
>
> Perhaps the most disheartening aspect lies in the lack of trust shown superintendents in general. [12]
>
> I do feel a sense of mistrust from the legislature and KSDE of local districts. That feeling of mistrust tends to stymie enthusiasm to lead and take chances for fear of making a mistake and being publicly ridiculed. [7]

This "high level of distrust from state to district" [10] is evident to these school leaders nearly everywhere they turn. From the outset of the reform process, they have been troubled by two perceived injustices. First, as men and women who have devoted considerable portions of their lives to education, they are hurt at being identified as the problem. They are particularly angry that, as one superintendent puts it, "there seems to be an attitude that since some are operating in an illegal manner, everyone must be" [12]. Second, they are disgruntled that "superintendents as leaders of the school district [were] left out of the legislative process" [11], that they had a "lack of input on the initial workings of the plan for restructuring [and] a lack of involvement in the process of drafting legislation" [3]. The feeling of "having no involvement in the beginning but being the person[s] expected to see that it works" [29] is especially nettlesome to these administrators.

As they grapple with the overhaul in their roles from directors to facilitators, dealing with a perceived loss of control is a constant struggle for these superintendents. "Less control in making change happen" [29] is most bothersome in three areas. First, there is a sense of confusion about the leadership dimensions of facilitation: the KERA "has reduced the superintendent to being a facilitator in many areas and there are so many 'gray' areas that leadership is difficult" [6]. Second, there is the discomforting feeling that their years of expertise have become devalued, that all that they have learned often

counts for little. This is especially depressing when they judge local school councils to be acting unwisely:

> I feel more like a paper shuffler . . . than an educational leader. I have felt like I set the tone for our district in the past and now the site councils can take their schools in directions that I have learned by experience are the wrong way. The time-lapse of waiting for them to learn the hard way is lost educational time. [6]

Third, considerable agreement emerged that superintendents are left with insufficient control over personnel matters, that in the new system "superintendents do not have enough say about how and which new principals are hired" [2], and that they "worried about how things [would] go when they no longer employed the principal or teachers" [21]:

> I have always felt that the main way a superintendent could affect a school district was through the teachers and other employees he employed. Now with restructuring, which brought about school councils, superintendents do not select the employees. [30]

Superintendents are also very sensitive to what they assess to be "less power at the board level" [25]. Some believe that "[b]oard[s] [do] not have the power they once had" [32] and that they need in order to do their jobs. These administrators believe that boards are "edgy about losing power/responsibility" [15] and "frustrated . . . from their diminished power as board

members" [13]. Their major concerns in this area are the lack of trust that is being exhibited toward Boards of Education[5] and a perceived diminution in the democratic process, the "elimination of voters' representatives in decision making" [8]:

> I feel that the board has been emasculated to the point that there is danger that local democracy will effectively end. [21]

Turning Power Over to Untrained Groups

> The most bothersome part of restructuring is the lack of expertise in the people now making important educational decisions. [6]

One dimension of the reform agenda that the superintendents in this sample find particularly worrisome is the distribution of considerable power to "new players with little background," or what one superintendent calls "school management by non-trained individuals" [26]. At the most basic level, there is a good deal of agreement that "set[ting] up people without administrative training or experience to make administrative decisions" [17]--or "leadership by committee" [17]--is not a wise policy.

As noted above, some concern is expressed about allowing individual school councils to make mistakes that will negatively affect children: the "sideline view of letting people make mistakes without interfering . . . is inexcusable when students and teachers are involved" [20]. Other superintendents worry aloud about the growth and impact of "special interest, single agenda forces" [4] at the site level. While there is hope that

"single interest or single issue people [won't] try to control the process" [15], there is concern that they might. Because it was argued that local school "councils that replace boards in their responsibilities would demonstrate the same characteristics as boards" [8], some skepticism was expressed about the putative benefits of school-based governing groups.

Finally, the matter of "who answers if it fails" [8]--accountability--is laced throughout the comments of these chief executive officers. The "willingness of groups to accept responsibility as well as authority" [15] is questioned. Due to this perceived "lack of accountability" [17] at the site level, some of these superintendents believe that the local governing process will "not be very effective" [17]. While a few superintendents believe that the "accountability of the superintendent [is] being passed down to middle management and staff" [16], most argue that "the local governance authority shifted but responsibility had not followed" [10].[6] This "accountability of the superintendent without his input" [26] is captured nicely by one superintendent as follows: "I am still accountable for my district, however, in many cases I'm not part of the decision making process" [26].

Conflicts with the State

> Local Boards and superintendents and in a few years the teachers may recognize that Kentucky's reform act does not return control to the local districts. Indeed, we now have a state-operated school system. [31]

A theme that continually resurfaced in the focus group discussion and that peppers the questionnaire responses is a conspicuous disgruntlement with the methods employed at the state level to bring about large-scale reform. It is somewhat ironic that a reform plan that is often hailed across the country as a model of local control is viewed by many of these leaders as a plan to transfer control from the local to the state level. This issue of "too much state control" [23] plays out for these superintendents across a number of fronts. The "method of imposition" [16]--"mandated changes" [31], "mandated site-based decision making" [29], "mandated councils" [6], "mandated programs" [32], and "too top down" [21], what one superintendent characterizes as "the ram down the throat process" [13]--rankles nearly everyone.

Superintendents in this study generally believe that there is "too much control by the state over testing and the instruction of children" [23]. They are cynical about what one leader called "mandated volunteerism" [20]. They discern a sense of duplicity both in "mandating things that should evolve as a result of districtwide interest in school improvement" [6] and in "people being told what to do under the guise of teamwork" [5]. There is a widespread feeling that "buildings aren't really empowered because the state is making all the significant decisions" [21]. Contrary to what is generally suggested about the KERA, these leaders see increased homogenization of education and a lack of attention to local needs. They also perceive an

expanding, not diminishing, array of regulations and reduced, rather than enhanced, degrees of freedom to act at the local level:

> [T]oo many restrictions and qualifiers and too little freedom at the local level in implementing some of the programs. [35]
>
> [N]o acceptance of suggestions to change the law or regulations. [29]
>
> [W]e've existed, being a small district, by parent and teacher involvement prior to KERA, but we did have some flexibility--now it seems to me to be more rigid. [26]

The relationship between these superintendents and the KSDE is strained at best: "our administrators are now frustrated with the state department" [21]; "many recent happenings at the state level make it hard to keep a high level of motivation going" [17]. For many of these chief executive officers, "the worst thing associated with restructuring was more state" [16] and the KSDE is the embodiment of the problem. At one level, they perceive an absence of "ownership" [25] and a "lack of focus at the SDE level" [3]: the "state department--they are as confused as I am" [32]; "there has been a great deal of confusion at the state department" [12]. These leaders also speak rather freely about what might best be described in today's argot as an attitude problem at the state department. References to "the threatening demeanor . . . of the state department in the implementation of KERA" [20] and to "the misinformation and half

truths from . . . the SDE hot lines about reform efforts and programs at the local level" [11] are representative of the sentiments of many in this sample of Kentucky superintendents. They believe that aspects of the KSDE operations are also damaging the relationship between districts and their schools:

> The way the department or at least some segments of the department are operating doesn't make for good positive relations between the superintendent and teachers/staff. [17]
>
> KERA put us at a disadvantage with our people because of decisions made at the state level. [23]

Finally, and again somewhat ironically, given the purposes of the KERA, the sentiment prevails that the "state department was becoming [more of] a regulatory agency" than an institution devoted to "providing services" [14]. It is felt that this "lack of flexibility" [20] and "overregulation by the state department limited [superintendents'] ability to lead" [21].

Focus on Structure Rather Than Content

> School-based decision making is becoming a level of bureaucracy rather than an effective structure for children. [7]

Although not at the center of their discussions, two important issues in this area are highlighted by the superintendents. First, there is a nagging worry that the entire reform edifice has been constructed on a rather thin knowledge base. As one superintendent puts it: "many parts of KERA are

not based on sound educational research" [20]. Another district leader, examining a particular aspect of the reform agenda, makes a similar point: "Kentucky's assessment program has all of its eggs in one basket and the fact is that the basket is 'untested' from the standpoint of effectiveness" [19]. There is a feeling that districts are being asked to "depend on the unknown and unfamiliar to attain highly critical goals" [7].

Second, some anxiety is voiced that the reform spotlight is being disproportionately focused on structural matters with concomitantly insufficient consideration being devoted to content issues: "We are only involved in who makes decisions, not what should be the motivation for change" [4]. One respondent captures this concern nicely when he reports that "many schools are willing to accept an increased role in governance but are not actually changing the teaching and learning process" [10]. Given the fact that there are "no clear answers, no proven history of success" [7], and a tendency to emphasize structural issues, the superintendents in this study "still have many unanswered questions about the effectiveness of some changes that have been made" [13]. The question at the forefront for many superintendents is: "Will restructuring bring about the improvements that everyone is expecting or is it another education movement that will eventually pass by" [22]?

Conclusion

The 35 superintendents who participated in this study provide numerous insights about the probability of success of the

adventure known as school restructuring--both in Kentucky and in the other states and districts throughout the country. They touch on what may be an expanding pattern in educational reform via restructuring: a reduced role for districts as issues are pulled upward to the state level and pushed downward to the individual school community. Indeed, it is not inconceivable that the focus on state goals and accountability structures and on local management of schools may produce new organizational and management arrangements in which district offices, school boards, and superintendents--historically the center of school operations--become unnecessary. The charter school movement in the United States--the analog of Grant Maintained Schools in the United Kingdom--is one model of such organizational arrangements.

No doubt, those who see boards and superintendents--and district offices in general--as a major source of the educational problem in this country will mark a reduced role for these players as a propitious turn of events. However, there is not much evidence that the movement in this direction will continue to its logical conclusion. It is probably premature to pronounce the patient--in this case the superintendency--terminally ill. If superintendents do remain viable actors in the educational enterprise, then more attention must be devoted to making their role effective than the 35 superintendents in this study believe to have been the case in Kentucky. What these leaders remind us is that institutionalized distrust and neglect of superintendents do not provide any stronger a base on which to reshape their role

or to construct improvement efforts than did similar strategies that were directed at teachers in the first wave of reform in the early-to-mid 1980s (Murphy, 1990a). Nearly all the leaders in these districts are frustrated. They feel disempowered, yet they believe that they remain on the point of the march toward greater accountability. Not surprisingly, they have a difficult time working up much enthusiasm for the reforms in the KERA.

If restructuring efforts are to be successful, a number of issues concerning the superintendency will need to be addressed. First, it is critical that there be across-the-board fidelity to the basic operating philosophy and assumptions of the prevailing reform ideology. In the restructuring movement, this means accepting the fact that problems are attributable more to the system than to individuals. It also requires reform via empowerment rather than control (Murphy, 1991). A mixed reform model in which some key actors are singled out for blame while other problems are traced back to the system of schooling contains the seeds of its own destruction. In the final analysis, superintendents are as much captives of dysfunctional systems of schooling as are principals and teachers. A failure to trust one is a failure to trust all. What holds for trust applies equally to empowerment.

Second, while the most thoughtful scholars in the area of educational change remind us that it is better to think big than small when it comes to improvement efforts, there are limits. The expectations contained in the KERA appear to have exceeded

those limits, at least for many of the districts in our sample. Most of the superintendents feel overwhelmed by what they believe is expected of them and others in their school communities, a condition that is only exacerbated by the perceived lack of state support for reform and unreasonable timelines for restructuring.

Third, if reform efforts like the KERA are to bear fruit, the role played by school superintendents must change. In this study, we see little evidence that anyone has given much thought to helping today's leaders make the transformation to tomorrow's leaders. Superintendents are no more likely to negotiate this passage successfully without support than are teachers and principals, in isolation, to make the dramatic changes envisioned for their roles in restructuring schools.

Notes

[1]Bracketed numbers refer to the superintendents in the study.

[2]A number of authors have pointed out two important contextual dimensions of leadership. First, in periods of crisis calls for leadership generally increase (Murphy, 1990b). Second, leaders generally receive more credit than appropriate when things go well and more blame than they deserve when things go badly (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985).

[3]The success of the reform movement is problematic for a variety of other reasons as well. The most important of these may be the failure of restructuring to consider adequately important changes that must take place between teachers and students (Murphy, 1991).

[4]It is important to note that a number of KEDC superintendents retired within one year of the passage of the KERA. Statewide, 50 percent of the superintendencies turned over in the three years since the enactment of the KERA (Scott, 1992).

[5]Critical analyses of the viability of Boards of Education have become increasingly common over the last two years. See Boards of Contention (1992) for a review.

[6]This same complaint is common among principals in restructured schools. That is, while authority for decisions is now shared with teachers and parents, they believe that responsibility for actions still rests with the principal (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992).

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